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Mrs. Caroline H. Dall,

IN MEMORIAM



ALEXANDER WADSWORTH

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Mrs. Caroline B. Dall,
July 8, 1898.

ALEXANDER WADSWORTH.

Born in Hiram, Me., May 6, 1806.

Died in Boston, Mass., Feb. 15, 1898.

A CITY that has been honored by the long life and services of such a man as Alexander Wadsworth cannot afford to follow him to the grave in silent eulogy.

That an abler hand than mine has not already sketched the outline of his remarkable character and work, can be due only to the fact that he so long outlived those who had been his associates.

Nearly a full century he lived, a century which has witnessed more remarkable changes than any in the world's history, and whose dying cry is, like that of Alexander the Great, "More worlds to conquer!" Worlds of science, of reform, of insight into God's purposes and man's achievements.

Whatever the changes, it was one of the charming traits of this man's character that they never found him unprepared. Conservative by temperament, the sweetness of his disposition and the perfect equipoise of his nature made him willing to listen, to read, to accept conclusions that must, at first, have seemed alien to his thought.

His fund of humor and anecdote, his quick perception of wit, kept him in touch with the young,

and preserved his mind healthy and active through his last days. His enjoyment of his grandchildren, their interests, and those of the young people who came in contact with him, and whose sympathy and love he retained, were proofs of the freshness of his heart and thought at the end of his ninety-odd years, when so many think only of their own ailments.

His patience with and reticence as to his own infirmities were most unusual and touching.

His love of reading, and his good eyesight, made his last years happy, although spent in the house, and kept him in touch with what was transpiring in the outside world. His share of responsibility in local politics he never neglected, feeling it a duty not only always to vote, but to attend caucuses and primary meetings. He took great comfort in the thought that during the sixty years that followed his establishment in business he failed to vote but once, and was then prevented by illness—a remarkable testimony to his well-ordered life.

His grandfather was General Peleg Wadsworth, born in Duxbury in 1748. In 1775 he was Captain of a company of minute men in Kingston, and afterwards an officer in Colonel Cotton's regiment when ordered to throw up the intrenchments on Dorchester Heights. In March, 1776, he was aide to Gen. Ward when the heights were occupied, and in 1778 was Adjutant General for Massachusetts. In 1780 the command of the Maine coast was given to him. After the term of his troops had expired, and he had only half a dozen men with him, he was taken prisoner at Thomaston by a force sent by the British commander at Bragaduce, which is now Castine.

After four months' imprisonment in the old fort at

Castine, he took advantage of a stormy night, and cutting a hole through the ceiling of his room, escaped with his second son, Charles Lee, who was to become the father of Alexander.

His ancestors had gone to Plymouth from Horsforth in Yorkshire, a town near Leeds. While his children were still young General Wadsworth removed from Kingston to Maine, and built the first brick house in Portland, which I believe is still standing.

Their third child was Zilpah, who married Stephen Longfellow and was the mother of the poet. Another daughter, Lucia, lived with the Longfellows, and became a second mother to Henry and Samuel.

Their fourth son, Henry, was a Lieutenant in the American Navy, who, at the age of nineteen, preferring death to Algerine slavery, voluntarily perished on board the fire-ship "Intrepid," blown up before Tripoli on the night of Sept. 4, 1804, lest it should fall into the enemy's hands.

Alexander Scammel, the sixth son of this large family, was second Lieutenant on board the "Constitution" when she captured the "Guerriere," and afterwards became a Commodore.

Charles Lee Wadsworth, the second son, was born in Plymouth in 1776, and left Portland for a farm in Hiram, Maine, in 1795. He, also, was the father of eleven children, again eight boys and three daughters. Alexander was the only one who left his native town, though all married. He was one of the youngest, and the last survivor of the group. He was born on the 6th of May, 1806. In the following year his aunt Zilpah carried her two boys up to the farm, the poet being only eight months old. "You would like my little Henry Wadsworth," she writes to her

brother. "He is an active rogue, and wishes for nothing so much as singing and dancing. He would be very happy to have you lift him up to the balls on the mirror." The poet was named for the uncle who died on the "Intrepid."

The potential civil engineer and the future poet were nearly the same age. In 1807 they played on the same hearth. Widely were the coming years to separate them until both lives were crowned equal in sweetness, usefulness, and honor.

Alexander lived a quiet farm life, walking, like many New England children of that day, three and a half miles to a school, open for only a few of the winter weeks, and to which he, like the rest, carried his dinner in a tin pail.

When fourteen years old he worked one summer in a tanyard long enough to season a batch of skins. A year after he was badly shot in the thigh by a farm hand, who was carelessly cleaning a loaded gun. Obligated to keep his bed for many months, he amused himself by making a pair of shoes. In those days, not only were spinning, weaving, and tailoring carried on in the cheerful farm kitchens, but a whole skin of well tanned leather was bought at a time,

When the autumn appeared, a cobbler came to make shoes, well fitted for the rough roads of the first incorporated town on the shallow pools of the Saco, which crossed it. But we may be sure that these months were not wholly spent in cobbling. It was doubtless in these days that Alexander made himself familiar with Shakespeare and Bunyan, and with the first reprints of the literature of the period, which were issued on gray paper in Philadelphia, and were carried by peddlers to the remotest towns. We may

be sure that he had his Bible always by his pillow, and that the eighth edition of Robert Blomfield's "Farmer's Boy," which, with charming illustrations, had been issued in 1805, helped to educate his keen perceptions of the changing seasons.

Not strong enough for farm work he was, fortunately, sent in 1821 to the Fryeburgh Academy, and a year and a half later to an advanced school, called the Gardiner Lyceum, in Gardiner, Maine. He had intended to study medicine, but on Mr. William Minot sending word to the Lyceum that there was an opening in Boston for a civil engineer and surveyor, he took a course of study leading to that profession, and came to Boston in 1825, at the age of nineteen, in a stage coach, with two letters of introduction and a few dollars in money in his pocket.

He went at first to a Mr. William Taylor, in Court Street, and when Mr. Taylor retired was able to purchase the business. He was kept busy from the very first day of his arrival in Boston to the very last years of his long life, seldom changing the location of his office, unless compelled by the growth of the business locality. Well do I remember with what consternation I heard, only a few years ago, that he was seen making an 'out-of-door survey from a lofty roof, with an assistant carrying chains and other implements; and on the third day of his eighty-seventh year he was out surveying, and three or four other undertakings of a similar kind were successfully accomplished in May and June of 1893, and closed his professional work.

In an account book in the hands of his family many details of his early life are entered. During his first year in Boston, from Sept. 1, 1825, to Sept. 12,

1826, his expenses only amounted to \$164.50. Board for three months, in those early days, amounted to \$39.50. It is to be hoped that continental currency had become extinct, for I have a journal of William Ellery's in which more than that was paid for a day's lodging.

In 1829 he began to subscribe to the Mechanics' Institute and Library and Boston Athenæum Gallery. In 1827 he enters his pew rent in the West Church and a subscription to its parish library. Many years after, when Dr. Charles Lowell had returned from his second journey to Europe, and I was intrusted with the reorganizing of the neglected shelves, I should have taken a still deeper interest in the first edition of the "Rambler" and the solid calf of Cotton Mather's "Magnolia," had I known how great a privilege my venerated friend had thought it to frequent the obscure rooms in Leverett Street, where Hannah Adams earned a tiny but most welcome stipend, as curator. Thus, in 1827, began his connection with this church, which lasted through the ministries of Charles Lowell and Cyrus A. Bartol, and only ended when its doors were closed. He was made deacon in 1842, and chairman of the Standing Committee in 1856, holding both offices to the very end of its life as a church. From 1850 to 1853 he was superintendent of the Sunday school. This school, said to be the first started in the city of Boston, came into existence rather against the wishes of Dr. Lowell, who feared that it might diminish the sense of responsibility in parents. It had a very remarkable history. It was founded when the church had no vestry, and the little room in the belfry, fitted up for the Doctor's Saturday catechising, proved far too

small for those who first applied. It was opened in a large but low-ceiled room over a butcher's shop in Green Street, opposite Pitts Street. It soon became so important an adjunct to the church work as to convert the much beloved pastor and to compel the parish to construct a large basement vestry, to which the Leverett Street library was removed.

I well remember being carried in my father's arms up the steep stairs which led to the Green Street room. I was set down in front of Miss Ann Kuhn, the acting superintendent of the day, and Deacon Wadsworth's interest in the school must have been almost as old as his connection with the church, for I distinctly remember his dear face even before I knew his name, in connection with those of Elizabeth Howard, Helen Loring and her brother, the distinguished lawyer and jurist, and, for many more years than I can count, its actual head.

It was during Mr. Wadsworth's connection with the school that I came into personal contact with him in delicate ways. I was visitor for the Howard Sunday school, under the care of the Rev. Robert C. Waterston, and one winter had a certain oversight of 400 families. More than once I had to go into very doubtful houses, and sometimes on very unwelcome errands. If at any time I needed a witness, or felt it imprudent to go alone, I applied to Alexander Wadsworth as the safest man I knew. The first time he went with me was his first experience of the "wages of sin"—in such a shape. It was a lovely Sunday afternoon, and as we walked home together in silence I saw on his face the expression of a deep, tender, perplexed concern, which I never forgot.

His earnest interest in the politics of his city and

State led him to become a staunch adherent of the Republican party from its formation until his death. He was for six or seven years a Common Councilman, five years on the water board, and went two years to the Massachusetts legislature. At the time of his death he was one of the directors of the Franklin Savings Bank, and for many years one of the managers of the "Home for Aged Women," resigning only when impaired health prevented his attending the meetings of the managers. His work in and about Boston involved many thousands of plans, as he surveyed a large part of the city and its suburbs.

He laid out the cemetery called Mt. Auburn, although the fact seems to have been overlooked when Dr. Bigelow published his "History of Mt. Auburn" in 1860. The laying out of a cemetery in Malden and another in Salem followed naturally upon that. Then came the grounds of the "Chicopee Works" and the "Foundry" at Springfield. Everywhere throughout the State his ability and faithfulness were recognized.

In 1835 a \$500 prize was offered for the laying out of Pemberton Square, about to be constructed beneath the very bases of Pemberton and Beacon Hills, in a region previously celebrated for its colonial mansions and exquisite terraced gardens—from whose summit, as a child, I used to watch the ships come into Boston Harbor. Forty-seven plans were sent in and Alexander Wadsworth took the prize. The old plan is now hanging in the new Court House, which has usurped the ground for which it was designed. It was a sad day for the West End of Boston when Pemberton Square ceased to exist as a desirable spot for private residences. The gold watch, purchased

with a part of this prize money, he carried for sixty-three years, and it ticked faithfully by his dying pillow.

His first survey was for the old "Sun Tavern," undertaken for John Knapp.

Boarding for a time at the "Old Grape Tavern," he had many memories of old Boston stored away, but was too modest to the very last to talk about these, unless some sympathetic friend lured him on, and unconsciously betrayed him into reminiscences. Many of us thus lost charming opportunities which we shall always regret.

In 1832 Mr. Wadsworth married Adelaide Wells, the daughter of Seth Wells, who died in 1834.

In 1836 he married Mary Elizabeth Hubbard Fairfield, daughter of John and Martha Hubbard Fairfield.

I was too young to remember Mr. Wadsworth in connection with his first wife, but after children began to come into the modest household in Temple Street I was a welcome visitor to the nursery and parlor. I have always considered it a great privilege that I was allowed free entrance to that home. Through his grandfather, General Peleg Wadsworth, Alexander was descended from John and Priscilla Alden, and a certain stern, Puritan simplicity marked his outward man, which tempted me more than once to say, "Why don't you speak for yourself, man?" No need of urging him to speak for others. When need was, heart and tongue were ready.

He was utterly devoid of personal ambition; had no desire to accumulate riches. Look at this long life of varied usefulness! With the motives which move the mass of men—with the power to create confidence which his faithful character gave—he

might have risen to any height! He was content to be the center of a happy home, where economy and moderate indulgence reigned. Often, as I sat with the happy group gathered around the solar lamp, with newspapers, books, and work, have I thought I saw the ideal of a New England home. It was such a home that Catherine Sedgwick depicted in her story of the "Barclays," and that Mrs. Lee led the way to in her "Three Experiments in Living." Such a home as will never again be seen until clubs, conventions, associations, and social ambitions have finished their work and left room once more for individual development.

No photograph ever gave—scarcely could any portrait give—a true impression of Alexander Wadsworth's character. The Puritan energy inherited from his grandfather drew strong lines across his face, but watch him by his wife's sick bed or playing on the floor with his children, and the lovely nature of the man gleamed across these lines and obliterated them.

In the pleasant house in Temple Street to which Mr. Wadsworth went when he was first married he must have lived more than twenty years. All his children were born there, but after the death of his wife's mother he purchased the house on Bowdoin Street which had belonged to her. This was perhaps in 1858, and here he must have lived for at least thirty years, and becoming more and more attached to it as time went on.

When the erection of the State House Extension made it necessary to take down this house and the State purchased it, it was very hard to give it up. It would have been harder but that he fortunately found in West Cedar Street a smaller house, built

about the same time, which did not remind him too painfully of the change. In the back parlor of the Bowdoin Street house was an open fireplace, with a mottled gray and black marble mantel, soapstone jambs, and brass andirons. This was removed to the back parlor in West Cedar Street, and when he sat beside it reading his evening paper I think my friend often forgot the change which had been so trying, and which brought tears to his gentle eyes when we went through ~~the~~ vacant rooms together for the last time.

CAROLINE H. DALL.

Washington, May 7, 1898.

NOTE.

The children of Mary Elizabeth Hubbard Fairchild and Alexander Wadsworth were five in number, of whom four survive him :

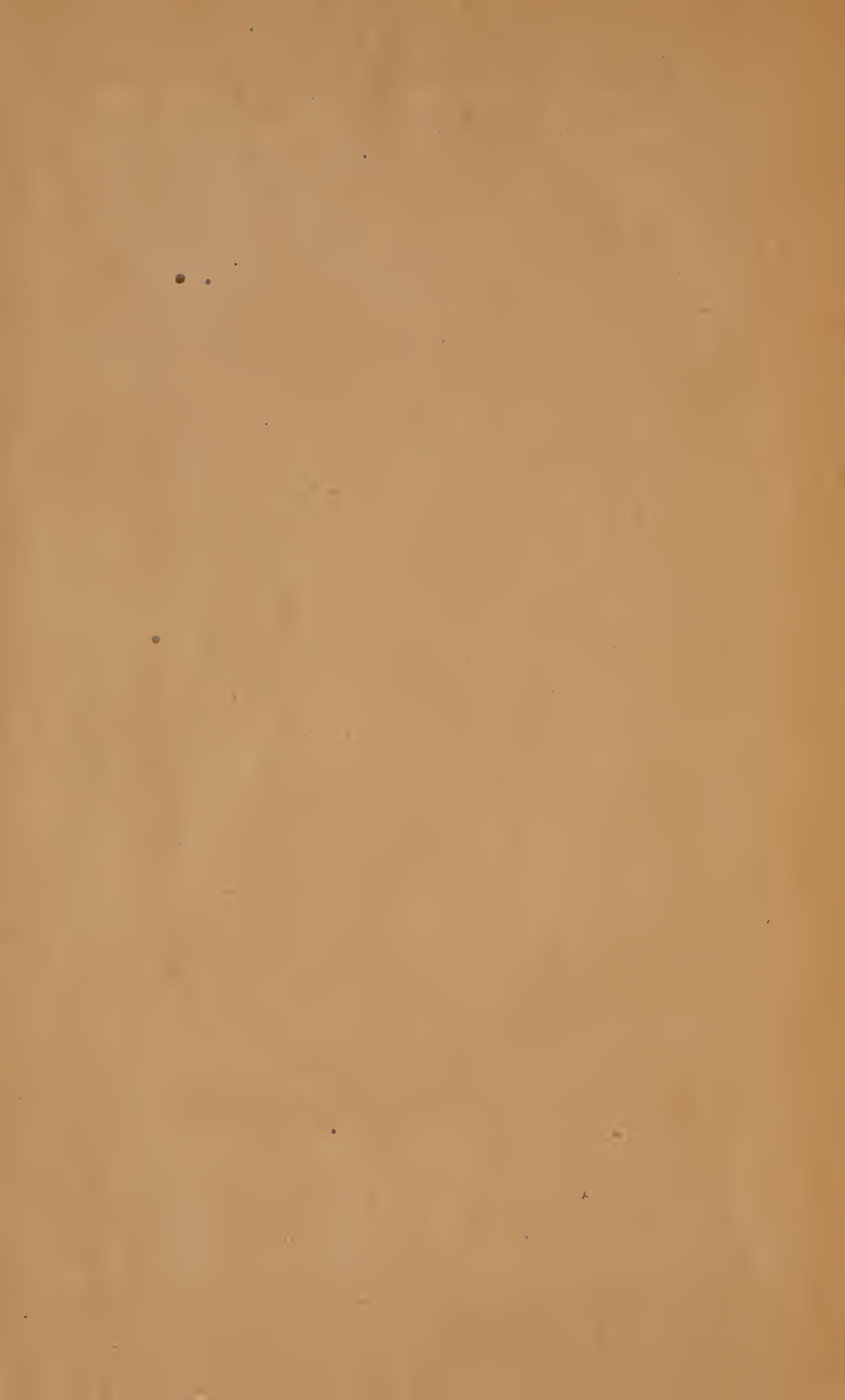
DR. OLIVER FAIRFIELD WADSWORTH, a well-known Boston physician,

ALEXANDER FAIRFIELD, a Boston lawyer,

LUCY, married to William Eliot Furness of Chicago, and

ADELAIDE ELISABETH, an artist.

GRACE, their youngest child, died many years ago, and of ten grandchildren nine survive them.



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